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## Google denies tracking users of 'incognito' private web browsers

James Cook

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**G**oogle has denied claims that it continues to track people when they are using private web browsers in 'incognito' mode after a study revealed it was possible for the company to do so.

A researcher from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, Professor Douglas Schmidt, claimed that Google could link a person's private browsing to the usernames and account information they use online.

"While such data is collected with user-anonymous identifiers, Google has the ability to connect this collected information with a user's personal credentials stored in their Google Account," Professor Schmidt says.

Founded in 1998, Google operates the world's most popular search engine and web browser, Chrome. It generates 90pc of revenues from advertising and is owned by Alphabet, the Mountain View, California-based group which is among the world's biggest companies. Alphabet's current market value exceeds \$844bn.

Many users prefer to use web browsers in 'incognito' mode in order to reduce the amount of data Google collects on them about the sites they visit.

Researchers tracked which data Google received from people using both Android and iPhone smartphones. The study found that Google received twice as much data from Android users than from iPhones.

It also claimed that Google was able to track supposedly anonymous web browsing from people using private browsers if they also signed into their Google accounts.

Google has heavily criticised the study which a spokesman says "contains wildly misleading information".

"This report is commissioned by a professional DC lobbyist group, and written by a witness for Oracle in their ongoing copyright litigation with Google," he said.

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Professor Schmidt has denied that his study was funded by lobbyists and said "I'm not familiar with anything in my report that Google has specifically called out as 'misleading'". He acknowledged being a witness against Google, but said the trial took place over two years ago.

Google Chrome's Incognito mode stops the web browser from storing cookies and other information and automatically deletes browsing history.

However, the function doesn't hide that browsing data from internet service providers.



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The Vanderbilt University study was released days after Google faced intense criticism over another privacy issue. A report found that the company tracked users' location data, even if they had asked not to be tracked.

Google apps on iPhone and Android smartphones were tracking location data even if user settings were configured to prevent them from doing so, the report found.

The company now faces a lawsuit from a customer who claimed that Google's "principal goal was to surreptitiously monitor [the claimant] and to allow third-parties to do the same".

San Diego resident Napoleon Patacsil is seeking to launch a class action lawsuit against Google. If granted, the lawsuit could allow millions of smartphone users in the US to join the case.

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